

VZCZCXRO0889  
OO RUEHMA RUEHPA  
DE RUEHFN #0542/01 1871627  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 061627Z JUL 06  
FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9993  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000542

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/EX  
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR DS/IP/AF, DS/CC, DS/IP/ITA  
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR CA/OCS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AMGT](#) [AEMR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [EAID](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: EAC MEETING: ACUTE WATER SHORTAGE -- POST PLANS  
CONSERVATION MEASURES AND ALTERNATE SUPPLY

#### Summary

1. A July 5 Emergency Action Committee meeting discussed the acute water shortage in Freetown and what actions post can take to mitigate its effects. The Guma Valley reservoir is seriously drawn down and municipal water rationing was instituted last week. On July 4, the Government established a water emergency task force which includes USAID. As Embassy water supplies have been reduced by more than half, the EAC established a list of conservation measures personnel are to undertake. There is some potential for augmenting our supply via purchasing from alternate water sources or hiring a water purification machine. Added to other serious stress in Sierra Leonean society, the water crisis is exacerbating public discontent with the Government. End Summary.

#### EAC Meeting on Acute Water Shortage

2. On July 5, the DCM conducted an Emergency Action Committee meeting on the acute water shortage in Freetown and the Western Region of Sierra Leone. In the Western Region, rains are reportedly further below average than elsewhere in the country with Freetown receiving nine inches last month versus 29 inches in the same month last year. The Office of National Security reported in a July 4 meeting, attended by the USAID Country Chief, that within 20 days the water in the Guma Valley reservoir, which supplies Freetown, will be completely exhausted, and if no rainfall occurs in the coming days, Guma would stop supplying water. The last few days have seen heavy rains in and around Freetown, but forecasts for further precipitation are uncertain.

3. At its peak, Guma supplies 23 million gallons per day, but that has been reduced to 13 million gallons, which the ONS says is inadequate to the city's needs. ONS also reports that Guma's low level means that it is delivering water of reduced quality that, while of "satisfactory" bacteriological quality, is difficult to treat in terms of physical quality (i.e., it is muddy).

4. The restricted water supply has made life more difficult and uncomfortable for most people, but the EAC has received no indications that there is as yet a widespread public health threat, despite reports of scattered cases of cholera which typically occur in the rainy season.

5. Investment in and upkeep of Freetown's water system have not kept pace with the rate of urban growth. Furthermore, leaking pipes have long been evident in many locations and now with water in short supply locals are breaking into the pipes to get access to the diminished flow, reducing end-point deliveries and further degrading a feeble delivery system.

## Government Task Forces and Public Information

¶16. On July 2, the GoSL Office of National Security activated its situation room to provide early warning and ongoing assessment of the water crisis. In its July 4 meeting, ONS cited some cases of civil disorder as people struggled to get water. Security of water delivery trucks has not been an issue. ONS created a technical task force to investigate alternate water sources, water rationing plans, on the spot chlorinating of alternate sources, drilling emergency boreholes, and availability of water delivery trucks. Meanwhile, the GoSL plans to provide public information via radio broadcasts. The ONS is looking at buying a water purification machine (source of funds unspecified) and sought the mission's good offices in examining a like machine at the PAE-operated ECOWAS Freetown Peacekeeping Depot. (See para. 10.)

## Water Supply to Mission Reduced

¶17. In the chronic near total absence of pipe-borne water to individual buildings, the mission routinely delivers trucked water to all facilities and residences. In recent days, the water authorities imposed rationing, reducing the mission's normal six 1,000 gallon water truck loads per day to two 1,000 gallon loads. For the time being, residences and facilities have water but there are too many variables for the post to estimate how long water will continue to be available.

## Mission Conservation Efforts

¶18. The broadly representative EAC meeting established a substantial list of water conservation measures to be

FREETOWN 00000542 002 OF 002

communicated immediately to mission personnel via an Management Notice. They range from capturing rain water in large containers, to strict discipline on potable water consumption, restricting washing machine use and car washing, and controlling the amount of water used by staff and guards.

## Potential Water Supply and Delivery Improvements

¶19. The New Embassy Compound does not yet have a dedicated water supply, but the small pipeline meant as a backup water supply is scheduled for completion in two weeks. More immediate help may be available directly from water sharing with the nearby residential compound of IMATT, the UK military training team. A private company in Lungi near the Freetown airport is offering water for Le 25 per gallon (\$0.008) while Guma Valley's price in Le 20. However, Lungi is a minimum three hour road trip from Freetown.

¶110. Perhaps most importantly, the Freetown Depot (PAE) has a reverse osmosis water purification machine that is capable of delivering 23,000 gallons in a 12 hour day and can be trucked to operate at a water source. PAE's estimated charge for operating the purifier is \$4-5,000 per month, but PAE said they could operate it for a few days as a training exercise. Finding and securing the rights to take water from a local stream is another matter. In addition, the Freetown Depot has water bladders for storage. If post were to source its own water, security for the processing and transportation equipment would be required.

¶111. In recent weeks the mission has depended on a PAE water truck, but recently received the parts needed to repair our own water truck and will complete the repairs ASAP. A second military surplus water truck requires an engine overhaul which also will be initiated immediately. In addition, IMATT, the UK military training team, informs post that they have a 5,000 liter water carrier to augment water haulage.

Comment

¶12. Post like the rest of Freetown is dependent for water on the dilapidated Guma system, and with rains arriving late and looking to be below average, a water crisis has emerged. Sierra Leoneans are stressed by scarce jobs, rising living costs, lack of electricity, and recent fuel and transport price increases. A struggle for the basic necessity of clean water could easily create episodes of incivility and potentially wider political upheaval, beyond the political finger pointing over the shortcomings of the municipal water system. We will continue to marshal our own resources and work with the GoSL and other donors to face the water shortage. In addition, so as to track the shortage, post will monitor feedback from contacts, including the American community, further increases in water prices, and the potential for civil unrest surrounding obtaining water. End Comment.  
HULL